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ABSTRACT

The primary function of the reading consultant is to work with teachers in effecting change in attitude, method, and curriculum so that all students move toward their full potential in learning. To accomplish this function, the consultant can assist teachers in several ways. First, he can help teachers conceive of reading as a thinking process that varies with the subject matter being considered and assist them in understanding how the mind comprehends and remembers new material. Second, the consultant can assist teachers in developing learning strategies that incorporate study skills unique to each content area. Third, by working directly with subject-matter teachers, the consultant can help formulate learning activities that are specifically aimed at the disabled learner. Likewise, teachers and the consultant can work together to make corrective reading activities more meaningful. Fourth, the consultant can be instrumental in innovating interdepartmental cooperation in helping students develop study skills common to all subjects. Finally, the consultant can provide the leadership necessary for implementing a comprehensive reading program in the school. However, unless the consultant has the capacity for personal relationships and is an open, caring person, his efforts in working with teachers to help students will not be fully successful. References are included. (VJ)

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THE ROLE OF THE SECONDARY SCHOOL READING CONSULTANT

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Have you ever thought of evolution as being related to the role of the secondary school reading consultant? Evolution is defined as "a series of related changes in a certain direction". The primary function of the reading consultant is to work with teachers in effecting change in attitudes, in methods, and in curriculum so that all students move toward their full potential in learning. This evolutionary aspect of "related changes in a certain direction" must be a continuous process if there is to be progressive development of the school's reading program.

Detecting the Thinking Process

For some teachers the first change is to conceive of reading not as a subject in itself, but as a thinking process that differs

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with the subject matter being studied. I would like to use an example from a Martian course in spyloctogy to take a fresh look at the nature of mathematics. This was done in geometry classes at LaFollette High School. I speak of this in detail to illustrate an approach applicable for teachers in other content areas. Mathematics teachers think it has made them more aware of process and its relationship to understanding content. Notice what gives difficulty in understanding spyloctogy and what thinking processes are required.

An Example from Martian Mathematics
Taken From a Text in Spyloctogy (1)

> In this chapter, we will be concerned with a study of the Pexlomb. A Pexlomb is defined as any Zox with picta namerals which flotate the Zox into five berta Zubs where each Zub is supramatilate to the Rosrey of the Ord. For example, consider the Zox defined by 3 berta Ooz. It is obvious that any pictanameral which is Blat must necessarily be Cort to the Ord. This follows from our knowledge of the relationship of a dentrex to its voom. However, if the Ord is partivasimous then the Zox must be Zubious. Thus if we kizate the dox pictanameral, our Zox will be flotated into 5 berta zubs. But remember, each zub must be supramatilated to the Rosrey of the Ord. If any one of the zubs is not supramatilated, we then have a pixilated Pexlomb which requires a completely different procedure.
>
> We can represent the necessary conditions by the following:
>
> 1. Q??---¢(note: Q is nubbed according to the principle of Plasimony)
> 2. By Axdrellation we arrive at: X Q/??---!!-*
>   Thus, it is evident that the solution must be:
> 3. M---/?? (Really quite simple if you remember to obscone in step 4 of the Axdrellation process.)
>
> What becomes apparent in this example?

1. The student must know the various kinds of vocabulary.

2. The student must be able to see the relationship of abstractions - X to Q, the dentrex to its voom. Exactly what is the relation-

ship when "each Zub is supramatilate to the rosrey of the Ord"?

3. The student must hold ideas and relationships in suspension as he continues to deal with more relationships and more information in the problem. The words "Thus it is evident" anticipate the synthesis of all this thinking in the solution of the problem - a very complex, abstract thinking process.
4. The students must realize that mathematics is dense, often packed with many concepts in a few sentences. As a result the student must read slowly - and then reread. Speed and comprehension are negatively related in mathematics.
5. Finally, a student must recognize the cumulative nature of mathematics with its concepts on an increasing scale of difficulty.

Understanding the Mind

After perceiving the nature of mathematics and the thinking processes involved, a relevant question may be: Since all this complex, abstract thinking is done by the brain, what do we know about this 10 billion celled instrument that can help us teach students how to learn more effectively? We know that complete understanding is essential to ~~understanding~~ remembering. We know that frequent use or review of new material facilitates retention. We know that in a cumulative subject, gaps in understanding bring the mind to a standstill until meaning fills that gap. We know that attitudes affect the functioning of the mind. For example, a positive attitude coupled with intellectual curiosity causes the mind to be more effective in comprehension; asking questions is a sign of brainpower and is basic to learning.

If we had a computer with ten billion parts, we would need directions in how to use it. So, too, in mathematics or any content area, the

student must synthesize his understanding of the nature of that subject and his knowledge of the mind's functioning into a workable plan for learning in that particular course.

Developing Learning Strategy

When a student has realized the high level thinking skills he needs to understand mathematics, he feels the need for higher level study skills. Materials developed by Ellen Lamar Thomas (2) on study skills in geometry are an excellent resource for students when they are ready to develop their own learning strategy. From this material they discover how to learn vocabulary, how to do in-depth reading, how to attend to diagrams and figures, plus other suggestions for understanding mathematics.

After the students have studied this material, the teacher asks each student to write a personal evaluation of what he must do to learn effectively in mathematics. This procedure includes the student's recording how his past study procedures must be changed to effect better learning.

Four weeks after the initial presentations, the teacher and reading consultant help the students evaluate their follow-through by determining what specifics in their learning strategy have been helpful and what changes still need to be made. Students are then asked to write their honest reactions to the course and to make any suggestions that would facilitate learning for them. One student commented, "Since there is real follow-up, we know you are serious about wanting to help us learn." The students were experiencing education as a cooperative process in which they had assumed some responsibility for growth and change. The teacher had acquired the necessary personal and intellectual

flexibility to make use of feedback from students in adjusting instruction. As a result an atmosphere of honest interaction between consultant and teacher, and teacher and students, made learning meaningful for everyone involved.

Helping the Disabled Learner

If all students are to be helped, the disabled learner must also receive the consultant's attention. Too often for this student, reading is not a means of learning but a frustrating end in itself. Teachers often have difficulty accepting these students as they are and setting reasonable behavioral objectives in working with them. A perceptive Western Civilization team of teachers realized, however, that they must know their student's strengths and weaknesses before they could know what to teach and how to teach their disabled learners. I instructed the three teachers in administering an oral reading test, detecting the most common errors, and recording the results. The oral reading test used was an informal inventory based on social studies materials at various levels. Although it took three days to finish testing all students individually, the teachers felt they had established a rapport with the students that ordinarily would have taken many weeks to develop. While talking to the students in testing, the teachers learned each student's interests and concerns; subsequently, the curriculum which was created could be meaningful. The students felt they had a part in developing the course and appreciated the personal attention.

Later the reading consultant helped in evaluating teacher-made materials and games developed to motivate the students to read. Thus, with the Western Civilization team, the reading consultant's role was

to equip the teachers in diagnosing problems, interpreting data and then assisting in adequate instructional adjustment.

Making Corrective Reading Meaningful

An American history team at LaFollette High School begins the semester by diagnosing their students' needs in the following ways:

1. The Nelson Denny test with an item analysis so the teacher and students know what skills each student needs to develop and what skills the entire class needs to develop.
2. An informal inventory on course material with questions asked to assess the comprehension and study skills of each student.

The teachers and the consultant then develop a card file with the diagnostic information recorded for approximately 600 juniors.

Each year this testing reveals the range within a class to be from about fifth grade level to college level. Since students cannot improve their reading skills when they are working at the frustration level, all materials available for the course are evaluated for difficulty of vocabulary, sentence length, concept load, and study helps. Each student knows his reading level and the level of all suggested material for a unit so he can intelligently choose what to read. Sometimes all students focus on the same questions or concepts but use different sources; at other times the students have differentiated assignments. Meanwhile, the search continues for materials, both fiction and non-fiction, at a variety of levels for each unit in the course.

When the teachers in any content area realize the needs of their students in terms of specific skills, they begin to see improved reading skills as synonymous with improved learning in their subject; then the reading consultant is in a position to be helpful. Some commercially

prepared developmental reading materials are good resources for helping teachers understand what the reading skills are and what techniques can be used in developing these skills. With the help of the reading consultant, the teachers can adapt these techniques to course materials. The skill development program can then be on-going and productive.

Innovating Inter-departmental Cooperation

One other activity that I wish to illustrate is inter-departmental cooperation in helping students develop skills such as detecting the organizational structure of an article in reading, or seeing the main concepts and how they are supported or developed. The science and history teachers have been helped in giving their students practice in previewing and questioning before reading so the students have a mental map for guidance. To further reenforce this organizational skill, speech class becomes a laboratory for preparing, outlining, and practicing speeches to be given in the science and social studies classes on subjects related to units being studied. Point of view and critical thinking are emphasized when a single topic such as the population explosion is presented as a scientific problem in science and as a social issue in social studies. The listeners write down the main ideas. A reading consultant is in a unique position to facilitate this type of inter-departmental development of communications skills common to reading, listening, speaking and writing. As a result, teachers and students become aware of the thinking processes common to learning in various content areas.

Implementing the Reading Program

Other examples of reading consultant activities at LaFollette High School include the following: helping teachers prepare materials to

aid students in learning how to listen, how to take notes on lectures, how to write examinations, how to use SQ3R in the various content areas, how to prepare for a laboratory experience in science; assisting teachers in development of informal inventories in science, industrial arts, and social psychology; helping teachers in the business department develop a vocabulary building program; assisting the football coach in evaluating the study skills of the football team; working with science, English and social studies teachers in curriculum development; directing in-service training for new teachers; teaching a remedial reading course to teachers of disabled readers; working with reading personnel K-12 in developing behavioral objectives for a continuous reading program at every level of education; assisting in the development of a performance criterion testing program based on behavioral objectives within content areas; evaluating plans for affective testing; and of special interest now is the development of a reading course negotiated by teachers and the board of education for all faculty and administrators who have not had a reading course since 1967. Teachers and administrators are currently assessing their needs as a first step toward developing the reading course.

Sharing insights in working together is good in-service training for the consultant as well as for the teachers and administrators. When teachers see positive results of their attempts to improve students' learning, those teachers are willing to share their ideas with the faculty on regular in-service days, with students in a university class to help prospective teachers see the application of theory to real teaching situations, and with parents at PTA meetings. Through such teacher involvement, the reading program becomes the teacher's program and

not just that of the reading consultant.

Creating the Consulting Relationship

Sampling teacher opinion, I discovered that teachers give top priority to four characteristics for a reading consultant; strong academic background, creativity, enthusiasm, and the capacity for personal relationship. Without the last quality, the capacity for personal relationship, the preceding attributes may be without effect. Working with people is the only way that a reading consultant can implement a reading program. Being an open, caring person is crucial in the consulting relationship. Teachers must feel that honest interaction is both desired and acceptable; then the teachers and the consultant are in a position to experiment and learn together. To be a reading consultant is to be a person in relationship with others in a common pursuit -- helping all students move toward their full potential in learning.

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1. Smith, Donald E. P. (Gen. Ed.) Learning to Learn. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1961, 81.

2. Thomas, Ellen Lamar. A Higher-Level Reading Approach for Geometry, printed at the Laboratory Schools, University of Chicago.